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Social definitions of *halal* quality: the case of Maghrebi Muslims in France¹

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In French mosques, the rules surrounding the consumption of food and drink (such as pork and alcohol), as well as table manners (using the right hand rather than the left to convey food to the mouth) and eating patterns (fasting during the month of Ramadan), are subject to frequent inquiry, along with those concerning marriage, sexuality and dress code. All such questions have one point in common: they question the limits of Muslim coexistence with non-Muslims. May a meal be shared with a non-believer? May a Muslim marry a non-Muslim? In whose presence may a Muslim woman remove her veil? The religious authorities at all levels – *fuqaha*, *oulema* and *imam* – face the difficult task of finding answers to these modern-day issues while relying for guidance on ancient religious texts. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Islam recognises certain practices inherited from the two preceding monotheisms, Judaism and Christianity, religions with which it maintains special relations. For Muslims, there exists a relative exogamy² with the ‘people of the Book’.³

Food is an area in which the principle of continuity with and tolerance towards the practices of the two older religions conflicts with specific Islamic instructions. In Europe, outside of *Dar el Islam*,⁴ imams’ opinions are divergent and can be divided roughly into two main tendencies. Some consider that *halal* meat is the result of a precise technical ritual described in the Islamic texts. Others, quoting a verse of the Koran, consider that meat is lawful as long as the animal has been killed by someone considered to belong to the ‘people of the Book’. These distinct tendencies result in diverse practices: some Muslims argue that the only way to abide by Islam is to purchase meat exclusively from *halal* butchers’ shops; others deem such strictness unnecessary for those who live in a Christian country; still others believe that slaughtering one’s own meat is the only sure way to guarantee its legitimacy and lawfulness.

These competing practices illustrate the diversity of interpretation arising out of Muslim religious texts. They reflect, or induce, the heterogeneous dietary practices and habits of Muslims in France. If a consensus cannot be reached on what criteria define *halal* meat in religious terms for Muslims in

Europe, it is perhaps because the production–consumption of this product – non-existent in the Maghreb⁵ – is primarily a commercial business. This statement must not be taken to mean that *halal* food is devoid of religious significance. Rather, studies show that buyers spontaneously ‘define’ it as the product of a religious ritual. It appears – indeed, it is the hypothesis developed in this chapter – that a religious rationale is applied more to the finished product than to the production process as such. The definition of *halal* meat belongs to the consumer who recognises and attributes its specific qualities.

Before developing this hypothesis and drawing conclusions from it, it is necessary to explain the empirical observations on which it rests. In France, *halal* meat sold in *halal* shops is produced by the standard industrial production chain in the abattoir and follows the same steps, in the same order, as ‘ordinary’ (i.e. non-*halal*) meat. In the abattoirs that I visited, the difference is more one of manner than of process. In both cases, *halal* and non-*halal*, the animal is killed by the drainage of all its blood. When the carcass is intended for sale to *halal* butchers, the act of slaughter is performed by a Muslim, who makes no use of stunning, while the animal is held in a ‘restraining pen’.⁶ Unlike *kosher* slaughtering (Nizard-Benchimol 1997), where the carcass is ritually examined (*bedika*) and, if found non-conforming, withdrawn from the circuit,⁷ the carcass to be sold as *halal* does not undergo a particular treatment. Unlike the Jewish *chekhita*, where a mark is made on the flesh by the *chokhet* to indicate to the Jewish controller–puncher at the end of the slaughtering chain that the animal has been slaughtered and examined according to ritual procedures, there is no means of tracking to guarantee that the carcass stamped *halal* has really been slaughtered by a Muslim. At the end of the chain, the carcasses are weighed and marked with legal and *halal* stamps by the same operator. After the post-mortem veterinary inspection, carcasses are dispatched to the fridges of wholesalers. From there, most of the carcasses marked *halal* are sold and conveyed to butchers’ shops; in cases where there is a surplus, the wholesaler can decide to sell the carcasses to non-*halal* retailers, preferably after having removed the signed portions of flesh. Thus carcasses stamped *halal* can be distributed in both non-Muslim and Muslim shops: *halal* carcasses do not systematically end up being sold as *halal* meat. Consequently, the meat obtains its *halal* status outside of the abattoir – in the *halal* shops, once cut by the butcher, and through its unique presentation. There, its particular shape and presentation render it recognisable by the customer as *halal* meat. This does not mean that such meat *will* be recognised by the customer as truly *halal*, but the possibility will at least arise, whereas that same cut according to French methods in a non-Muslim butcher’s shop will not be seen as *halal* at all.⁸ In this food chain, it is the customer in the act of purchase who appears to be the first to authenticate the *halal* status of the meat.

What renders meat *halal* is not a material process in strict conformance to an imagined uniquely Islamic prescription; to understand what is *halal*

for meat or food it is necessary to go beyond the abattoir. I suggest in this chapter that the quality 'halal' is rather the result of a social and economic consensus between the different generations and cultures of migrant Muslims as distinct from the non-Muslim majority. The production of halal meat seems to adapt to the differing viewpoints of Muslim groups, despite the lack of a clear religious definition.

In the first part of this discussion I sketch a brief history of the development of the halal market from its origins in France, taking the region of Bordeaux (in south-west France) as an example,⁹ and showing, notably, that the Muslim authorities took very little part in that development. Lacking a definition of what is unique to halal meat, the halal market grew relatively rapidly. In the second part I give my reasons for suggesting that the end-consumer, through the retailer, possesses control over the definition of the halal quality of meat. In the third part I present two consequences of my hypothesis. Being consumer-driven, the halal market responds rapidly to its social and economic context, as is shown by the development of a new definition of halal built by subsequent generations of Muslims born in France to whom halal is, first of all, a guarantee that food is free from any *haram* substances.¹⁰ This definition leads to a conception of separate circuits of production and a separate Muslim 'diet'. Another consequence of this consumer-driven market is that its growth appears compatible with the recent institutional reorganisations of the food control institutions and the food industry at the European and international levels, designed to take greater account of the choices and ethical concerns of consumers.

The development of the halal market

In 1990, a study was done for the French Ministry of Agriculture in which economists calculated that 200,000–350,000 tonnes of meat annually are required to meet the demand for halal meat by the 4 million Muslims living in France (Nefussi 1995a). My study, based in Aquitaine, estimates that over 1996–2000 the number of halal meat retailers doubled in the St Michel neighbourhood of Bordeaux alone (Bergeaud-Blackler 2001). A combination of economic, practical and religious factors in the late 1990s led to the rapid expansion of a market that had not even existed until the 1970s. As I show, six factors contributed to create and develop a halal meat market:

- the search for new market outlets;
- the increased severity of regulations governing slaughter in the context of European integration;
- the availability of a low-cost and flexible labour supply;
- the multiplicity of religious interpretations of halal ritual;
- the withdrawal of religious groups from the struggle for control over halal meat;
- the virtuous economic effects of the suspicion of 'false' halal meat.

One of the deciding factors in the growth of the halal meat market was the desire of the operators of beef and lamb chains to find new outlets for a commodity that the market's evolution had diverted from its former destinations. Improvements in productivity and new policies promoting 'quality' led to a pattern of 'protected chains', the side effect of which was to produce animals classified as non-conforming. For instance, in Gironde, the producers of lamb shifted from classical production to production labelled 'Agneaux de Pauillac'. To be classed as conforming to this label, animals must comply with certain characteristics. When this is not so, the animals cannot be sold in the protected circuit. After the inception of the European free market and the development of quality schemes under the pressure of food crises, public institutions such as prisons, hospitals, school canteens and the processed-food industry proved incapable of absorbing all these surpluses. The search for new outlets became a priority for local producers and the slaughterhouse industry.

From the 1980s, French regulations governing the slaughtering of animals (Decree 80-791), and EC pressure for its better enforcement, required all slaughtering of animals by Muslims to be undertaken by competent workers inside a properly equipped slaughterhouse. Industrial production chains of halal meat developed rapidly while respecting strict divisions of labour: Muslims contented themselves with the retail sector, while non-Muslims controlled the production and distribution. There were no obstacles to this rapid development, not even the strict hygiene inspection regime governing such perishable products. Halal butchers have not been subjected to regular inspections as the authorities consider it relatively unproblematical, from the point of view of both public health and tax revenue, that the animals are slaughtered in recognised abattoirs and sold in established outlets rather than illegally slaughtered, sold and consumed.¹¹

Confronted with this rapid development, the State sought to regulate the halal market in order to prevent the potential rewards brought about by its profits falling into the hands of Islamist groups which do not conform to the ideal of 'republican integration'. In 1990, following the terrorist attacks in Paris of September 1986, the 'Rushdie affair'¹² and the first occurrence of the 'headscarf affair' in Creil,¹³ the Interior Minister Charles Pasqua (in charge of religious matters) sought to encourage the creation of an institution representative of Islam in France in order to have only one interlocutor in his negotiations with the Muslim population. One of his first initiatives was to attempt to establish a national monopoly on halal certification. He arranged a meeting between the Fédération Nationale des Exploitants d'Abattoirs Prestataires de Service (FNEAP), the most powerful representative of the interests of the slaughterhouse industry, with the director of the Institut Musulman de la Mosquée de Paris, the oldest (although not the most popular) Islamic institute in France. This initiative led to a written agreement giving the halal certification exclusively, and with it potentially great economic power, to the Mosquée de Paris. But the members of the FNEAP refused to implement the agreement: its conditions were for them far less advantageous than the

contracts they had already negotiated at the local level with wholesalers. However, immediately after this convention was signed, the economic actors started to speculate in the halal market. Consequently, numerous slaughterhouses invested in costly stunning pens suitable for ritual slaughter and in recruiting qualified Muslim slaughterers. Some wholesalers contacted Islamic associations requesting information on halal consumption or investigated the possibilities of opening halal butchers. If the State failed to regulate the halal market, it indirectly – and involuntarily – favoured its growth.

While the processing sector was becoming organised, the distribution sector benefited from a flexible labour supply made up of Maghrebi unemployed construction workers, metal workers and farming hands. These job-seekers entered the butchery trade with very little initial capital, often supported by family members or other personal connections. Helped by tax exemptions granted by the State and voluntary labour by family members, together with, in some cases, non-declared sales or continued social welfare benefits for families, a number survived the difficulties and established what developed into successful businesses,¹⁴ though some experienced excessive competition and closed their shops within a year of opening them. The competition did not favour a cooperative spirit among butchers and resulted in the failure of any attempts to regulate retail meat prices. Wholesalers speculated around these disagreements and their consequences. The halal market, considered by non-Muslim wholesalers as particularly unstable and unpredictable, was treated with little consideration and sometimes with disdain. The general attitude, as it was understood by one non-Muslim wholesaler, was ‘that one doesn’t fight over crumbs’. In rural areas, for instance, halal business was silently left to the monopoly of a single operator by the others. This operator could then put pressure on the grocer, imposing low quality of carcasses at relatively high wholesale prices.

During the 1980s, when the need for Muslim establishments (schools, mosques and cemeteries) was being expressed more widely, the State systematically refused to make any public contribution to Muslim groups due to its policy of non-involvement (*laïcité*) in religious matters. The leaders of Muslim organisations envisaged a tax on halal meat to ensure the creation and maintenance of Islamic establishments. However, the supply chain for Islamic butchers had already advanced too far, and the retailers refused to enter into ‘quarrels’ that they felt did not concern them. They did not wish to form alliances with mosques or other institutions, disagreements with which could potentially lose them an already volatile clientele. As a result, the Islamic associations decided not to directly engage in these debates. Some did express support for the creation of independent associations of halal certification, but had no further involvement.

In Aquitaine, the mid-1990s saw a period of deflation in halal retail meat prices. In addition to the presence of strong competition, a dynamic arose of a great suspicion of ‘false’ halal meat. Halal shops were opening at an increasing rate, always promising to be ‘more halal’; while, several years

later, the market arrived at a quantitative saturation and successive food crises began to have an effect on buying practices; qualitative differentiation appeared and prices stopped falling.¹⁵ The halal market entered into a new phase. Grocer–butchers started dealing directly with farmers in the cattle markets, trying to contact the competitors of their wholesale butchers and seeking to impose their own employees as ‘sacrificateur’ in the abattoirs (despite a French regulation mandating that such work was to be done only by slaughterers accredited by one of three approved mosques). They also better acquainted themselves with the cutting techniques, aiming to improve the output of the carcasses. They decorated their shops with images evocative of tradition and the ‘local butcher’; and, to combat concerns over British beef (which was thought to carry BSE), displayed in their shop window, next to a large halal sign, a notice guaranteeing their beef to be 100 per cent French.

To conclude this first part, it can be noted that the butcher experienced a competitive situation preventing him from controlling retail prices, while the consumer enjoyed an advantageous position. The qualitative differences offered choice to consumers while prices were low compared to supermarket prices. Rumours of ‘false’ halal meat proliferated, resulting not in the decline of the market but rather, conversely, in the virtuous effect of pushing shop-owners to offer higher quality and service at a low price.

Devaluing the act of slaughtering

My study of the production and consumption of halal meat shows a certain independence between the actual conditions of halal meat production and the consumer discourse. Consumers know little about the process of the production of halal meat. When questioned, several people asserted that halal meat is paler than non-halal meat because, unlike the latter, it is drained of its blood. In fact, this difference is attributable to the age of the slaughtered animal rather than to the method of slaughter. Like butchers in the Maghreb, Muslim butchers in France tend to buy the meat of young bovines because it is considered to be more tender. This meat is particularly low in price on the French market because it is discarded by non-Muslim butchers whose consumers consider it undesirable, ‘neither veal nor beef’. This ignorance about what goes on before the delivery of the meat to the butcher is not unique to the Muslim population. Rather, it reveals the physical and symbolic distance built by urban society towards all that reminds people of animal death (Agulhon 1981; Vialles 1987). The fact that some claim to be able to distinguish halal from non-halal meat just by its appearance reveals that consumers have appropriated the product without need for control over its production.

As will now become clear, the societal and cultural changes produced by immigration can, at least in part, explain this rapid acceptance. The migrant women who entered France to rejoin their spouses under the ‘familial regrouping procedures’ have played a major role in setting up Maghrebi

shops and in determining the ingredients stocked by those shops. The particular place of meat in North African cuisine has changed under the influence of other culinary traditions. Finally, Maghrebi men were not included in the production processes as much as they were in their home country.

Prior to 1974, Maghrebi immigration was mainly of males and was considered largely temporary. Then, the French Government decided to stop all primary immigration other than family regrouping. As men could not go back to their country without risk of being unable to re-enter France, they preferred to bring their spouses and family and settle permanently in France. When they arrived in France the Maghrebi women revolutionised the networks of small local shops, which the larger supermarkets and factories had nearly overtaken. Supply and distribution systems developed rapidly and were able to provide these women with all the necessary products for their recipes. Several new Maghrebi retail shops opened in the residential areas of these families. Fresh produce such as fruits, vegetables, meats and other animal products were purchased through local wholesalers; spices, dried fruits, teas, flours, tinned foods and certain cereals were bought from specialist national suppliers to the sub-Sahara African, Turkish and Asian communities. The essentials for preparing North African dishes were then available to Maghrebi women. Despite often being unable to read the labels, the women learnt to distinguish and choose products, and were rapidly dictating their choices to the retailers. They also imposed on grocers their preferences regarding the quality and presentation of meat, which had an impact on the entire organisation of the supply of food and the spatial lay-out of shops. To meet the women's desires, the grocers had to ensure a permanent supply of freshly slaughtered meat and to adapt their meat-cutting skills to the requirements of the different cooking techniques required by Maghrebi cuisine (Hal 1996), a task particularly difficult with very fresh meat.¹⁶ When a piece of meat was not sold within three days of being delivered to the retailer and had started to discolour, the butcher would convert it into a ground-meat product, such as *kefta* or *merguez*, in order to sell it before the next weekly delivery. The bowls of marinated olives and bags of spices and herbs were placed near the refrigerated windows, where perishable items are normally displayed, to suggest quality and freshness. In return, the ground meat benefited from the 'flavour principle' particular to Maghrebi cuisine, giving the idea to those entering the shop that the meat could even have originated in the home country.¹⁷ The job of skilfully cutting and dressing the flesh, which contains very few bones and little fat, greatly impressed clients attracted by mounds of bright-pink flesh suggestive of power, luxury, abundance and satiation.

Whether they live in the city or in the country, all immigrant families in France, regardless of income, are able to buy meat for daily consumption. The price of meat is significantly lower in relation to average income than it is in the Maghreb, where it is essentially a luxury food item and is consumed infrequently by the majority and regularly only by a small group of urban families.¹⁸ Where variations in meat price exist between shops – particularly

since the recent period of quality differentiation – they do not reflect a segregation of the market, as is the case in Morocco, for example, where different types of butcher serve distinct social groups (Bergeaud-Blackler 2002). In the Maghreb, there is a clear differentiation between meat for daily cuisine (scant portions consisting mainly of bones and fat, and used more as a condiment or seasoning) and meat for special meals (sizeable portions of good fresh meat). In France, this differentiation no longer exists. Fleshy meat can be consumed fairly regularly by the majority of families, so that its consumption is no longer a distinctive attribute of the higher social classes. The distinction rests no longer on social but rather on cultural and religious criteria. For consumers, to eat *halal* is perhaps not the same as eating in Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia, but neither is it to eat like the French. Eating *halal* meat is to eat as Muslims do.

In France, animal slaughter has become a clandestine act, whereas traditionally in the Maghreb it was an act of honour (Bonte et al. 1999). Animal slaughter is discretely practised by Muslim families living in rural areas and by a minority of urban families despite potential penalties. But this function of putting to death and selling, that was traditionally passed down to men, seems to be fading, even during the festival of *Aïd el Adha* (Feast of the Sacrifice, also called *Aïd el Kebir*). French and European regulations have deprived the Muslim father of his prerogative as *sacrificateur* by ordering the killing to be delegated to a qualified slaughterer in a proper slaughterhouse. The Islamic authorities for their part insist that the ritual act represents a manifestation of obedience to God, but at the same time they offer alternatives to the sacrifice such as monetary gifts for the sacrifice of a sheep in Chechnya or Iraq, the meat of which could feed a Muslim family living there. Studies carried out over the last twenty years (e.g. Brisebarre 1998) affirm the great popularity of *Aïd el Adha* among immigrant Muslim families. But if the ritual steps (choice of animal, preparation of the ‘victim’, sacrifice, sharing of the pieces, ritual meals) are adapted to new contexts by a majority of the families, the *sacrifiants* (those on whose account the sacrifice is made) are far more numerous than the *sacrificateurs* (those who carry out the slaughter). The delegation of the sacrifice tends to become the rule rather than the exception. During the three days of the festival, the ritual cuisine of the *Aïd el Kebir* (the commensal, collective and female dimension) is taking over from the ritual sacrifice of *Aïd el Adha* (the religious, individual and male dimension). The feast becomes orientated more towards commensality (Detienne 1979: 21) and the sacrifice itself diminishes in importance, the symbolic dimension of the act fading to the benefit of the material nature of the animal. Hence the animal is the focus of the feast – and of its controversies.¹⁹

Having shown that the control of the slaughtering process has escaped from the religious authorities as well as from the male Muslim, and that in doing so it did not prevent the exceptional growth of the *halal* meat market in France during the last two decades, it can be said that that market has followed the preference of the consumers. This can explain why the *halal*

market seems so heterogeneous throughout Europe and can even present different facets within a single country such as France. Being 'consumer-driven', this market can respond relatively rapidly to the changing demands of consumers. The past five years have seen an increasing circulation of halal products for urban consumers: ready to eat, convenient, in small portions. This market meets the conception of halal for the generation of Muslims born and educated in France.

Towards a globalised halal market?

One of the factors accounting for the rapid establishment of halal butchers is certainly the absence of pork. While doubts are always possible concerning the method of slaughter, the buyer knows that she or he will never encounter a pork product in a halal butchers. Perhaps because for the younger generation the cuts of halal meat resemble those sold in any other type of butcher's shop, or because they often consume industrially prepared meals, they demonstrate particular concern about the presence of pork or pork products in the food they purchase. As I now show, the act of choosing halal expresses a cultural and religious belonging as well as a rejection of certain foods for reasons of both identity and health. Halal is certainly an exclusive discriminator; it is, however, anything but limiting, in that it opens up to Muslims of all generations and all countries a world halal food market. The new halal products of a 'globalised' Islam (Roy 2002) can today circulate easily across the five continents, particularly since 'halal' is today standardised by the Codex Alimentarius, an institution recognised by the WTO.

The taboo of pork pre-dates Islam and was upheld in Judaism and other religions situated in the general area of the near and middle east (Simoons 1994). Inscribed explicitly in the text of the Koran, the interdict has always been respected by the majority of Muslims.²⁰ When this law is broken by individuals, it is often a way of contesting religious authority (Douglas 1971; Detienne 1979). For the anthropologist Mohammed Benkheira (2000), the pork prohibition is so well internalised in Maghrebi Muslims that it must be distinguished qualitatively from the alcohol prohibition. Consumption of alcohol is overt, declared, conscious, voluntary and leads to repression. The pork taboo is so internalised that it can be compared in its intensity to the taboo of incest: 'We avoid incest not only because the laws, both written and unwritten, forbid it and therefore because we fear chastisement if we violate this law, but also because even the idea of incest revolts and disgusts us' (Benkheira 1995: 80). In other words, the distaste for pork in Muslim societies is so profound that it is hardly even necessary to forbid its consumption.

The recent episodes of food crisis have revitalised the pork taboo among many Muslims living in France. The origins of the diseases related to them are interpreted in religious terms: the 'mad cow' has been turned into an 'omnivore', like the pig; and in spontaneous discourses, the pig is also positioned at the source of foot-and-mouth disease.

The presence of any trace of pork derivatives, alcohol or any other prohibited substance has become a new subject of discussion. The Muslim discussion forums on the internet drive, develop and at the same time 'democratise' the debate about the border between what is considered edible and inedible, permitted and not permitted in Islam. These forums are an ideal window through which to observe the Islam of Muslim youth. My systematic investigation of messages in two Internet sites' discussion forums show that the technical aspects of slaughtering are considered less important than the issues of food content and questions related to commensality. The varied interpretations of religious texts are problematical for young Muslims, particularly when they concern the fundamental questions of marriage or relationships. Several interpretations continually feed these anxious debates. For example, certain Muslims believe that the Koran's assertion 'the food of the people of the Book is permitted' authorises the sharing of meals with non-Muslims provided that the Muslims do not eat pork. A different reading of the verse permits the sharing of meals with a non-Muslim only when it is certain that the entire meal contains no pork or pork products. Yet another interpretation opposes this latter principle of 'abstention in case of doubt' by another affirming that pious Muslims should not be suspicious and should refrain from inquiring about the composition of the food served. In these more-or-less subtle debates, there seems to be but a single certainty: pork is haram.

The plurality of such social definitions of halal products explains why there are several halal certifications and why all attempts to reduce them to one have thus far failed. Currently, in France, fresh meat is sold mainly according to 'domestic convention', while processed foods and poultry are sold according 'industrial convention', though this situation may well change in the future.

Until now, halal butchers have not seriously considered creating a protected label. In the region I surveyed, fresh halal meat in butchers' shops is always sold according to a 'domestic convention' (see Sylvander and Melet 1992) based on personal trust.²¹ The responsibility for the meat's freshness and halal qualities is placed by the customer squarely on the butcher. The exchange rests on an agreement formed by what Pierre Bourdieu (1994: 181) would call the 'taboo of the explicit', according to which 'to declare the truth of exchange . . . is to annihilate exchange'. 'What is expected of social agents is not that they perfectly follow the rules, but that they submit to these rules, give visible signs that, when possible, they will respect the rules.' In this type of domestic agreement, a label would be a 'practical euphemism'.²²

Commercial halal labels exist in France. They apply to processed foods containing meat or non-fresh red meat, such as non-pork charcuteries or industrial poultry. In these cases, the halal label is the only means of assuring the consumer that the wrapped food is free of pork, alcohol or any haram substances. Halal conventions exist also in certain French abattoirs which prepare meat intended to be frozen for export. They usually take the form of bilateral conventions between the abattoir and the wholesaler of

the importing country. Since the 1990s, the international business of halal products has developed so intensively that on 17 July 1997 the Codex Alimentarius adopted a guideline for the use of halal claims in order to prevent different conceptions of halal from becoming obstacles to global trade. The international halal trade of frozen beef and lamb benefits exporting countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Ireland to a lesser extent. The exporting countries supply frozen meat to such countries as Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, for the region of the near east, and especially the flourishing markets of Indonesia and Malaysia. The principal exporters of poultry, a much smaller market, are Brazil and France.²³

Whereas for numerous primary immigrant Muslims in France halal is related to slaughtering and the necessity of 'draining the blood', the international rules insist rather that halal products be purified from any haram, or unauthorised, substance and kept from contact with non-halal products. For the primary migrant halal rests on a domestic convention to which personal relations are central, whereas the Codex Alimentarius gives consistency to the label halal. The skill of the butcher, the basic requirement for achieving halal quality according to the oldest of the surveyed interviewees, has no primary importance in this new system of halal food. The international trade responding to the demand of growing urban Muslim populations gave a different meaning to the quality 'halal'. Further investigation is necessary to ascertain whether this new conception of halal is a pure 'invention' of international trade or whether the countries more advanced in this trade have imposed their own definition. The Malaysian market, for instance, is one of the more aggressive markets for halal products. Malaysian companies do not intend to sell the EU countries just halal meat or foodstuffs but also halal confectionery, halal food supplements, toiletries and cosmetics.²⁴

One can imagine that in France in the near future the role of the sacrificateur (certain imams prefer the term *executant* – see Oubrou 2001), who is in some poultry slaughterhouses simply replaced by a machine, will be less and less technical and concerned more with controls to confirm that the slaughtering chain is not polluted by some haram substance in the abattoir and that the labels do not mislead the final consumer. With the general spread of labelling, the consumer will be in the position of ultimate controller, which should lead the retailers to ingenious marketing methods in order to attract a clientele who will no doubt become increasingly sceptical and even mistrustful. To date, no fixed definition of the quality halal has been successfully imposed, which has probably helped the market to grow, and with an energy that twenty years ago, when it was predicted that halal food would disappear with the second generation of migrants, was certainly not expected.

Notes

- 1 I am particularly grateful to Anne Elene Delavigne, Anne Murcott and Arounda Ouedraogo for helpful suggestions. I also thank Ken, my partner, who helped me to translate this text.
- 2 The exogamy is possible only for Muslim males.
- 3 i.e. Jews and Christians.
- 4 This phrase can be translated from Arabic as 'Islam home'.
- 5 Benkheira (1995) suggests that 'halal meat' in the Maghreb is meaningless because there is no need to identify it as 'halal'.
- 6 In order to meet standards of safety, hygiene and animal welfare in the case of ritual slaughter, EC Directive 93/119/EC requires the use of a restraining pen or casting pen.
- 7 In the kosher case, after ritual examination by a religious specialist (the *chokhatim*), the carcasses are declared either to conform, in which case they are sent to the kosher circuit, or not to conform, in which case they are rejected and sent to the ordinary circuit. All the backs of the carcasses are sent out of the kosher circuit.
- 8 What I refer to as 'non-halal' meat of 'ordinary' butchers excludes kosher butchers.
- 9 The analysis presented here has been built on data collected in Aquitaine where I undertook a study on the production and consumption of halal meat. The survey on consumption included interviews with ninety-seven Maghrebi families (mainly Moroccan and Algerian, and a minority of Tunisian) and systematic investigation of web forums (Oumma and Islamie). The survey included investigations of the 5 abattoirs in Aquitaine used for ritual slaughter and systematic interviews in all the butchers' shops (49 in total) found in the 5 departments of Aquitaine: Gironde, Lades, Pyrénées, Atlantiques and Dordogne. This study, which started in January 2000 and ended in October 2001 with the delivery of the final report, was funded by Aquibev, DRAF Aquitaine and DGAL Ministry of Agriculture.
- 10 *Haram* is an antonym of *halal*.
- 11 At the time of the survey of the Islamic butcheries in Bordeaux, the director of veterinarian services knew of the existence of 5 halal butchers' retailers, whereas I found 20.
- 12 The publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* provoked numerous protests by Muslims in Europe and throughout the world, calling for his condemnation as a blasphemer.
- 13 Three young Muslims were excluded from school classes because they wore a *hijab* (Islamic headscarf). For the first time Muslim associations openly took a stand to support them.
- 14 Exemptions were accorded to very small businesses during the first two years, and for longer for those set up in 'sensitive' zones.
- 15 Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, or mad-cow disease), poultry dioxin, foot-and-mouth disease.
- 16 The longer a piece of meat is refrigerated the more it coagulates and easier it becomes to cut. Conversely, when it is very fresh, the meat fibres are more flexible and the more difficult it is to cut it into regular slices.
- 17 According to Beardsworth and Keil (1997: 154), the 'flavour principle', an expression developed by Rozin and Rozin (1981) consists of 'specific combinations of flavouring elements which provide each cuisine system with its own characteristic gustatory identity'. It characterises the traditional cuisine and one of its functions is to 'sustain a sense of familiarity and confidence.'

- 18 To give a Tunisian example, the ratio of consumption of meat between the poor and the rich has been found to be 1:7 (Tahar Jaouadi 2000).
- 19 The animal becomes the focus of the controversies because it raises more than ever the question of animal slaughter and mobilises animal welfare organisations.
- 20 'The dead animal, the blood, and the flesh of pork are forbidden, and any [food] over which the name of other than Allah has been invoked' (Holy Koran, excerpted from 5:3). For a list of noteworthy exceptions see Simoons (1994: 35–6).
- 21 In the domestic convention 'the risk for the customer to be disappointed by the characteristics of a product is minimised by the establishment of repeated relations between the seller and the customer' (Nefussi 1995b: 3).
- 22 'Les euphémismes pratiques sont des espèces d'hommages que l'on rend à l'ordre social et aux valeurs que l'ordre social exalte, tout en sachant qu'elles sont vouées à être bafouées' (Bourdieu 1994: 185).
- 23 For a broader view read *Halal Food Products Market Report* by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (2002). A copy can be found on the Canadian Government's official website at <http://sea.agr.ca/africa/e3281.htm>.
- 24 Document of MATRADE (Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation), the national trade promotion agency of Malaysia, available: www.matrade.gov.my.

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